

ASHFORD URBAN DISTRICT
Medical Officer's Annual
Report for 1904.

MR. CHAIRMAN, VICE-CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

I have the honour to present you with my Report on the health of the Ashford Urban District during the year 1904.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The estimated population of the district in the middle of the year is 13,567, that for North Ashford, the part north of the railway line, being 8,867, and that for South Ashford, including New Town, being 4,700. The deaths during the year registered in the district numbered 163. To these must be added 8 residents who died outside the district, and 5 non-residents dying in the district must be subtracted. The corrected number is therefore 166. This gives a mean annual death-rate of 12·23 which, although slightly higher than the last two years, is well below the average for the country generally.

During the severe outbreaks of Diphtheria and Enteric Fever with which we were visited, twelve deaths occurred, and these account for our death-rate being

higher than usual, as it is most unusual for us to have so many deaths occur from infectious disease.

The death-rates from all of the causes enumerated in Table I. at the end of my report, are below the average for the country generally, save only those I have just mentioned, and cancer or malignant disease.

This disease has shown a steady increase in the death returns throughout the whole country of late years, and whilst the figures for this district keep about the same, they are rather higher than the average for the whole of England. It is to be hoped that the great efforts now being made throughout the civilised world to determine the ultimate cause of this dire disease may be, before long, crowned with success; so that the science of preventive medicine may have the lines along which it should act, to combat it, more clearly defined.

The Infant Mortality, or deaths of children under one year, calculated as a rate per thousand births registered, is 99·64. This figure is decidedly low, and would have been lower still except for the abnormally large number of deaths due to premature birth. Epidemic Diarrhœa, the most fruitful source of infant deaths in Urban Districts was entirely absent from the district during last autumn, and no infantile deaths were registered from this disease.

The Zymotic Death-Rate, or death-rate from the seven principal Zymotic diseases, namely—Small Pox, Measles, Scarlet Fever, Diphtheria, Whooping Cough, Fever and Diarrhœa is 1·48.

This figure is not high as compared with the country generally, but is higher than usual for us. This is accounted for by the epidemics to which I referred earlier in my report.

The Birth-Rate.—During the year 281 births have been registered in the District. This gives a birth-rate of only 20·70, which is the lowest of which I have any record.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

During the year I received 110 notifications of infectious disease. These I have classified and arranged in a table given at the end of my report in which the figures for former years are also given.

We were most unfortunate during 1904 in being visited with epidemics of infectious disease, and I will deal with them as they occurred through the year. I may say, however, that I do not consider that they reflect in any way on the general sanitary condition of our town. In hardly a single case was any sanitary defect found in the condition of the houses in which infectious disease occurred, although systematic and thorough inspection was made in every case. Schools have played a very large part in spreading such diseases as Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria, and in several instances it has only been by means of frequent visiting and inspection of the children attending the various public elementary schools, and by weeding out infectious or doubtful cases, and in one case closing the school for a period, that I have been able to check the spread of these epidemics. Here I should like to recognise the valuable assistance I have received from the masters and mistresses of the various public elementary schools in detecting sources of infection. In a number of instances children attending school in an infectious condition have been detected and sent home for medical inspection, and the further spread of the disease averted. I consider that we owe a great debt of gratitude to them for their watchfulness and care.

During January and February there was not a single notification of any infectious disease, but in March six cases of Diphtheria were notified. These first cases were scattered throughout the district, and in all, except one case, occurred in infants too young to attend school. Towards the end of April a sudden outbreak of a very fatal type was notified. Twelve cases were notified in a few days with five deaths. I was able to connect all these cases with the children from two families, and as soon as they were isolated the notifications ceased. Three cases were notified in May and then the epidemic died out. The measures taken to deal with the outbreak were—Isolation of all infected cases, and daily systematic weeding out of all cases of a doubtful nature in the schools. By the valued co-operation of the medical men in attendance, doubtful cases were submitted to bacteriological investigation by the Clinical Research Association.

In June an outbreak of Scarlet Fever arose affecting chiefly the infants attending the New Town Schools. This was due to the disease in a mild form having attacked certain children and, being undetected, children in an infectious condition were attending school and spreading the disease. Scattered cases of this disease continued to arise during July and August, the complaint being generally of a very mild type.

In November and December a further outbreak occurred, affecting this time principally children attending the National School.

I found it necessary to close the Infant section of this school in December for a fortnight.

The most serious epidemic, however, that we sustained was in September and October. In this case the disease was Enteric Fever, and was brought into

the town by hop-pickers returning from Boughton-under-Blean. In all there were seventeen cases notified and five of them had a fatal termination. The disease was of a particularly virulent type. I made a special report on this epidemic to the Local Government Board. The non-notifiable diseases were none of them prevalent to any great extent during the year, and it was not necessary to close any schools on their account.

THE ISOLATION HOSPITALS.

During the year the temporary Hospital has been removed from Beaver Lane and re-erected on a site on the Burton Farm estate. This Hospital is intended to accommodate eight adult patients, in two Wards. Closely adjoining this we have erected a second block similar to the first, only accommodating twelve patients instead of eight. We propose to use the new block for the treatment of Scarlet Fever, as this is the disease we are most frequently called upon to isolate. The old block will be kept for cases of Diphtheria or Enteric Fever.

The Warren Lane Hospital will now be used only for Cases of Small Pox. We are therefore, now much better equipped for isolating infectious disease than we have ever hitherto been.

During 1904, the Burton Farm Hospital was in continuous use from the end of April onwards. Altogether 44 cases of Scarlet Fever out of 48 notified were removed to, and treated in the Hospital. One death occurred from a second attack of the disease affecting a convalescent patient.

We have been obliged to use the Warren Lane Hospital in an emergency on two occasions during the year. In the first instance, during the Diphtheria outbreak in April, six cases were treated there. The

second occasion, was during the Enteric outbreak in September, when eight cases were admitted. It will not in future be necessary to use this Hospital for other diseases than Small Pox.

MORTUARY.

I have to record that during the past year the District has been provided with a long felt want in the shape of a Mortuary. From time to time a decent and proper place for the bestowal of the dead bodies of strangers and persons who have died from accident or suicide ; and where post mortem examinations could be made, has been a necessity ; and our coroner has on more than one occasion commented on the absence of such a convenience. The Mortuary has been erected on a piece of land adjoining the Swimming Baths in Beaver Road, and is fitted with proper conveniences to render it suitable for its purpose.

MIDWIVES ACT.

During the year we have carried out the provisions of the Midwives Act, by forming a Register of the Midwives practising in the District, and supervising their work.

The Midwives Committee hold periodical meetings which are also attended by the Midwives. At these meetings the Registers and Bags are produced and inspected, and the Midwives questioned on various points so as to make sure that the Regulations are being properly observed.

At the beginning of the year I gave a series of four lectures to the Midwives, explaining the provisions of the Act to them *serialim*, and making them clearly

understand their responsibilities and duties in connection therewith. I have every reason to believe that they are conscientiously carrying out the Regulations laid down.

FACTORY AND WORKSHOPS ACT.

A Register of the Factories and Workshops in the district has been formed during the past year, and, although it is not yet complete, we hope shortly to make it so. A large number of the Workshops have been visited and inspected, and the Regulations under the Act enforced.

WATER SUPPLY.

The supply of water from the Henwood source continues to be plentiful and ample for the present and future needs of the town, and this in spite of an unusually dry year.

I append a copy of the latest analysis by the Clinical Research Association. It will be noticed that the water though still very hard, is three degrees below that analysed at the same period last year.

ANALYSIS.

				Grains per gallon
Total Solids .. ..	..	..	..	33'25
Combined Chlorine .. ..	..	..	..	2'20
Expressed as Na Cl .. ..	..	..	..	3'63
Nitrogen as Nitrates .. ..	..	..	..	0'04
Nitrites .. ..	..	..	..	nil
Saline Ammonia .. ..	..	..	..	0'0020
Albuminoid Ammonia .. ..	..	..	..	0'0026
Oxygen absorbed .. ..	..	..	..	0'019
Total Hardness .. ..	..	..	..	24'01
Lead or Copper .. ..	..	..	..	nil

This is water of a satisfactory degree of organic purity. It is somewhat hard, but otherwise a good water for drinking.

NUISANCES.

The only nuisance of which I have received any complaint during the year, was that caused by the smell arising from rubbish tipped into the ponds on land situated near the top of Beaver Road. In company with the Surveyor I made a detailed inspection of these premises, and we arranged with the owner, that after one partially filled pond had been completely filled and covered over with soil, no further rubbish should be tipped on this site. This has now been accomplished, and I believe there is no further cause for complaint in this direction.

In consequence of the prevalence of Infectious disease, my work, during the past year, has been unusually heavy, and has involved a great deal of my time. I have visited and enquired into each notified case of Infectious disease.

I have also during the outbreaks of Scarlet Fever, and Diphtheria paid frequent visits to the Schools attended by the children affected, making detailed examinations of those present and weeding out doubtful and infectious cases.

As Medical Officer of the Isolation Hospitals, I have also ordered and supervised the nursing arrangements, and checked the accounts before presenting them to the Sanitary Committee.

In addition to my monthly reports to the Sanitary Committee, and quarterly reports to the Council, I have made a special report on the Enteric Fever out-

break, and one on the necessity of closing the Infants' section of the National School in December, copies of which I have forwarded to the Local Government Board and the County Council.

I have also made visits to the Common Lodging-houses and Slaughter-houses.

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours faithfully,

CLAUDE M. VERNON,

Medical Officer of Health.

I.—TABLE SHOWING CAUSES OF DEATH.

CAUSE OF DEATH.	NORTH ASHFORD.	SOUTH ASHFORD.	TOTAL.	RATE PER 1,000 POPULATION.
Scarlet Fever	—	1	1	·073
Whooping Cough	2	1	3	·22
Diphtheria	1	6	7	·51
Enteric Fever	5	—	5	·36
Epidemic Influenza	1	—	1	·073
Diarrhœa	4	—	4	·29
Puerperal Fever	—	1	1	·073
Phthisis... ..	10	6	16	1·17 ₁
Other Tubercular Diseases }	5	—	5	·36
Cancer	7	4	11	·81
Bronchitis	8	7	15	1·10
Pneumonia	3	5	8	·59
Other Respiratory Diseases }	1	—	1	·073
Alcoholism	2	—	2	·14
Premature Birth	8	—	8	·59
Accidents of Parturition	1	—	1	·073
Heart Disease	10	8	18	1·32
Accidents	5	—	5	·36
Suicides... ..	1	1	2	·14
Bright's Disease	2	1	3	·22
Convulsions	4	1	5	·36
All other Causes	33	11	44	3·24

II.—TABLE COMPARING BIRTHS AND DEATHS WITH FORMER YEARS.

YEAR.	POPULATION.	BIRTHS.	RATE.	DEATHS.	RATE.
1898	11,593	254	21.91	144	12.42
1899	11,710	294	25.10	172	14.18
1900	11,850	317	26.32	164	13.83
1901	12,808	296	23.11	163	12.80
1902	13,094	318	24.27	152	11.60
1903	13,328	334	25.06	134	10.05
1904	13,567	281	20.70	166	12.23

III.—CASES OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES NOTIFIED DURING 1904 AND PRECEDING YEARS.

Disease.	Total.	North Ashford.	South Ashford.	1903.	1902.	1901.	1900.	1899.	1898.
Small Pox ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Diphtheria ...	36	15	21	10	10	2	1	16	6
Erysipelas ...	7	6	1	10	2	3	5	4	3
Scarlet Fever ...	48	24	24	1	8	17	13	25	22
Enteric Fever ...	18	17	1	4	—	7	1	19	15
Puerperal Fever	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	—
Chicken Pox ...	—	—	—	11	11	—	—	—	—
Total ...	110	62	48	36	31	29	24	65	46

